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The role of diamonds in fuelling conflict

Letter dated 21 November 2000 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to transmit herewith the ministerial statement issued at the conclusion of a meeting on diamonds held in Pretoria on 21 September 2000.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 175.

(*Signed*) Dumisani S. **Kumalo**
Permanent Representative
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

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Annex to the letter dated 21 November 2000 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Ministerial statement

Conclusions of the ministerial meeting, Pretoria, 21 September 2000

We, the ministers and representatives of the world's leading diamond exporting, processing and importing States, met in Pretoria on 21 September 2000 at the invitation of the African diamond-producing countries to agree on what we could do to break the link between the illicit trade in rough diamonds and armed conflict.

We reviewed the challenges and reached the following conclusions:

- We are concerned that the trade in conflict diamonds is prolonging wars in parts of Africa, is frustrating development efforts and is causing immense suffering. We understand conflict diamonds to be rough diamonds which are illicitly traded by rebel movements to finance their attempts to overthrow legitimate Governments;

- We recognize that conflict diamonds make up only a small fraction of the overall market for rough diamonds. The legitimate diamond trade makes a critical contribution to economic development worldwide. For this reason, we need to devise pragmatic and effective measures to address the problem of conflict diamonds while ensuring that we do not harm the legitimate diamond industry;

- We are resolved to do more and to work together to deny these conflict diamonds access to world markets, while recognizing the difficulty of devising and enforcing measures to prevent the smuggling of items that are portable, concealable, valuable and difficult to identify by source, such as diamonds.

We welcome important progress to date, in particular:

- The readiness of the Republic of South Africa and other countries participating in the conference to co-sponsor a resolution at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly;

- The role of the Security Council in addressing this problem. We commit ourselves to the full and rigorous implementation of the various United Nations sanctions regimes targeting the link between the illicit trade in rough diamonds and the supply of weapons and fuel to rebel movements;

- The initiative of the Group of 8, in the context of its commitment to conflict prevention expressed at the summit held in Okinawa, Japan, in July 2000, to support practical approaches to the issue of conflict diamonds, including consideration of an international agreement on certification of rough diamonds;

- National initiatives, including the steps taken by the Governments of Angola and Sierra Leone, to put in place effective national certification schemes, as well as the efforts by trading and marketing centres in Belgium, Israel and India to strengthen regulation of and transparency in the trade;

- Proposed steps by industry, including the resolution agreed at the World Diamond Congress held in Antwerp, Belgium, in July 2000 to address the problem of conflict diamonds;

- The constructive role played by civil society organizations in raising public awareness on the issue of conflict diamonds, proposing practical solutions and helping generate the necessary political will required for concrete action.

We especially welcome the African initiative that led to the Kimberley process. As the first of its kind, this initiative brought together producing, processing and trading countries, and drew on the different perspectives and expertise of Governments, industry and civil society in generating ideas for workable solutions. It highlighted that the problem of conflict diamonds is of international concern and requires a comprehensive and practical approach.

We agree that:

- A comprehensive approach should be explored to deal with the causes and drivers of conflict;
- A mechanism of establishing an intergovernmental body to monitor compliance with the certification system should be investigated. This should include investigating the relationship between the intergovernmental body and the World Diamond Council;
- We take note of the report of the Working Group and commend it as a valuable contribution to future international efforts to address this problem;
- We are resolved to maintain the momentum of the Kimberley process by moving ahead into an intergovernmental process to design a workable international certification scheme for rough diamonds. We favour a simple and effective scheme that does not place an undue burden on Governments and industry, particularly smaller producers;
- We therefore welcome the initiative to convene an intergovernmental conference in London to bring in other interested States and take the multilateral process forward.

We are conscious of the need for Governments and industry to work together and to implement effective measures soon. This is necessary to curb conflicts in parts of Africa and to maintain consumer confidence vital to the well-being of the industry. We are equally conscious of the need to ensure that the diamond trade optimally contributes to sustainable development and of the importance of working towards that objective.